



A periodic report from
THE NATIONAL DIGITAL LIBRARY PROGRAM
THE LIBRARY OF CONGRESS

Digitization opens up rich cartography collections

Digitizing maps and atlases for the National Digital Library (NDL) Program is a formidable task that LC's Geography and Map (G&M) Division, keeper of 4.5 million maps and 60,000 atlases, has assumed.

Why? Since most maps are oversize, they require special handling as well as special scanning equipment. Also, the geographic and cartographic industries have special requirements for map scanning to ensure that historic maps can be used with modern digital geographic data.

Scanning maps from different time periods requires consideration of elevation models, road and boundary files and satellite imagery, among other factors. The large size of many of the original maps means that digital files are quite large, frequently several hundred megabytes. Quality assurance and post-processing of such large images requires powerful computers and software.

G&M's approach to scanning reflects the impact of digital technology on the production of cartographic and geographic data. Many of the technologies used for scanning the materials for the NDL Program are widely used within the geographic information systems industry and have been for more than a decade. Thus there is already

major demand and support from a large user community for the scanning of historic maps and atlases.

GEOGRAPHY AND MAP DIVISION

In January 1995 the Center for Geographic Information was formed, an industry group dedicated to the support of the Library of Congress's Geography and Map Division in its transition to the digital world. Two member firms of the center have already made substantial donations of equipment to support the division's efforts.

Tangent Engineering Inc. of Englewood, Colo., donated a large-format, flatbed color scanner and printing system. It can scan flat items up to 24 by 34 inches at resolutions of up to 600 dots per inch and in 24-bit color. Hewlett-Packard donated a substantial array of computer equipment and cartographic software packages and data, including an optical storage device, engineering-class workstations and personal computers and several printers. This equipment will be used in the post-processing of maps scanned by the division.

Other companies participating in the Center for Geographic Information will also donate software and expertise to help develop effective methods for scanning and disseminating the Library's maps. This support supplements the four staff positions assigned to G&M by the NDL Program.

The development of a graphic interface to facilitate the selection of maps covering a user-defined portion of the earth's surface is vital to the successful scanning of maps. Considerable work remains to be done to design such an interface.

The scanning of maps presents many challenges for G&M. But working with the National Digital Library Program, the geographic and cartographic community and the Library's Information Technology Services, the division will be able to meet these challenges and share its rich collections widely.

— Gary Fitzpatrick,
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DOES A DIGITAL WORLD
THREATEN THE COM-
MUNAL NATURE OF THE
PUBLIC LIBRARY?
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With the flood of new technologies has come a "flood of infotainment, which degrades knowledge."

—James Billington, Librarian of Congress

Preserving the inclusive nature of American public libraries

A topic no less ambitious than "The Transformation of the Public Library" was the subject of a recent conference held at the Library.

The Dec. 8 events were sponsored by many of the most important institutions working on issues relating to access to digital information (see box).

Deanna Marcum, president of the Council on Library Resources, opened the activities by noting that, for many Americans, their public library evokes "warm feelings" about a place that is open to everyone with a desire to learn. "Digital information greatly enhances the possibilities for all groups of users," she added. Paying

tribute to her host, she called the Library of Congress, "the ultimate American public library."

James H. Billington, the Librarian of Congress, also welcomed the attendees and spoke eloquently of Americans "who made a difference" in the nation's libraries. It was Andrew Carnegie's "fascination with information" that led him to provide the funds for the establishment of 2,800 free public libraries, the Librarian said.

Herbert Putnam, Librarian of Congress (1899-1939), persuaded Congress to increase the Library's budget to build its collections and subsidize the cost of cataloging, which benefits libraries across America and around the world. It "costs more to catalog a book than to buy it," Dr. Billington noted.

"As the first Librarian of Congress who is an expert in a foreign [Russian] culture, I am especially aware of how important and precious our public library system is," he added. "Many believe it is one of the most important features of our democracy."

The Librarian then discussed what he believes are four common characteristics and threats to public libraries:

First, according to Dr. Billington, "for democracy to be dynamic, it has to be based on the dynamic use of knowledge." The threat is that with the flood of new technologies has come a

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Photo by Yusef El-Amin

Deanna Marcum, president of the Council on Library Resources, maintained that digital information should enhance the free nature of public library resources, not threaten it.

"flood of infotainment, which degrades knowledge."

Second, "knowledge must be openly accessible to all people. Today, open access is threatened by the possibility of 'information-haves' and 'have-nots' — not by a conscious effort to monopolize information, but by the costs of delivering that information," he warned.

Third, the communal nature of public libraries as "temples of pluralism" in America is endangered by "the idea that you can get anything you want from home. The image of a lonely nerd in front of a computer screen is a de-formation of the idea of a gathering place."

Last, Dr. Billington lamented the fact that where once libraries "represented a kind of communal tribute to the values of the book," they are now at risk, due to the pervasive "culture of television, which has, for many, replaced active knowledge gathering, such as reading."

The Library's National Digital Library Program is designed to stimulate users to go back to books to find information to supplement their on-line research. The program focuses on nonbooks because, according to Dr. Billington, it is these materials "that are not easily accessible" because of their fragility and rarity.

"The National Digital Library gives a new boost to the intellectual community. We at the Library of Congress regard you as our partners in this effort."

—Guy Lamolinara
Public Affairs Office

The Librarian of Congress, James Billington, cautioned against a culture of "information haves and have-nots," the antithesis of the public library concept.

Leading entities in the library world took part in the conference on public libraries, hosted by the Library of Congress.

Coalition for Networked Information
Kennedy School of Government
University of California at Berkeley
National Research Initiatives
Carnegie Library of Pittsburgh
Houghton Mifflin
University of Michigan
Public Library Association
Los Angeles Public Library
Utah State Library
Flint Public Library
Libraries for the Future
Center for Urban Education
Rutgers University
The Benton Foundation
Harvard University
University of Pittsburgh

Andrew Carnegie's "fascination with information" led him to provide funds for 2,800 free public libraries.

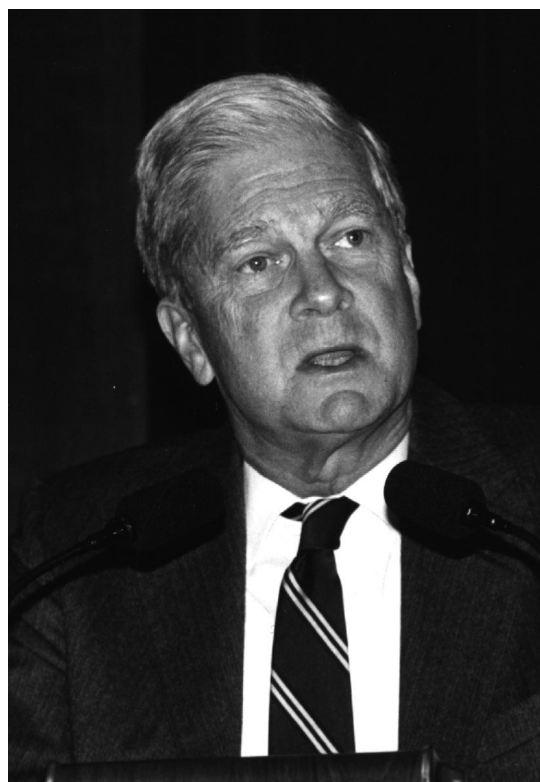


Photo by Yusef El-Amin

"What a great opportunity for us, working with libraries across the country, to help develop electronic libraries worldwide. I'm honored by this appointment."

—Suzanne Thorin,
Chief of Staff,
Office of the
Librarian

Library Chief of Staff to represent U.S. at G-7 electronic library sessions

The Library of Congress is reaching out to the Global Information Society by participating in the G-7. Through its participation, the Library officially represents the United States on issues of international importance to the future of libraries. The global network of electronic libraries is one of the 11 pilot projects endorsed by the seven participating nations (United States, Canada, Great Britain, France, Italy,



Germany, Japan). On May 29, 1995, the Library of Congress participated in the first G-7 working group on Electronic Libraries at the Bibliothèque Nationale de France.

Suzanne Thorin, the Library's chief of staff and coordinator of the National Digital Library Program, serves as the official U.S. representative for the digital library (Bibliotheca Universalis) initiative of the G-7. As the U.S. representative, Ms. Thorin is responsible for working with the U.S. Library community and other national libraries to develop a concrete agenda for international cooperation, attending international meetings and providing periodic status reports.

THIS REPORT
IS ON THE WEB*

NEXT ISSUE

Our next issue will be published and distributed in March.

A PERIODIC REPORT FROM
THE NATIONAL DIGITAL LIBRARY PROGRAM

Reports will be published about 12 times a year, using gift funds. Comments and suggestions are welcome.

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